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ABSTRACT

The school's reaction to homosexuality, in particular as related to the teacher, is discussed, and studies relating to the homosexual are referenced. What the educator can do to prevent homosexual behavior is, according to Hooker (1961): (1) create a climate that allows homosexuality to be openly and sensibly discussed and objectively handled; (2) provide for adequate sex education of both parents and children, so that the homosexual can understand himself better and the community can free itself of its punitive attitudes toward all sexuality; and (3) increase efforts to provide family counsel and child guidance services designed not only to promote healthy family life but also to provide specific help for parents whose children show early signs of developmental difficulties before these become fixed. (DB)

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HOMOSEXUALITY: AN EDUCATIONAL CONFRONTATION

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Of all the activities of human beings, those connected with sex have been subject to the most intense efforts at regulation. Various societies have had varying attitudes toward sex, ranging from almost unlimited permissiveness to absolute prohibition. Our Western Christian Civilization, based on Judaic morality, has clearly tended to be repressive in this area (Lindner, 1963, p. 57). Our schools reflect society and enforce and transmit this repression. During the years of bodily growth and sexual maturation, shame and guilt are attached to all forms of erotic play, while illogical, mythical fears, anxieties, and punishments are swiftly brought to bear on any sex-related activity.

Certainly the teacher's impulsive response to children's sex-play is in many cases modified by the "acceptability" of the activity. A young boy showing affection to a girl might be smilingly accepted as being "cute", but a boy showing affection to another boy frequently would be treated as exhibiting an unnatural latent tendency that must be stamped out--for the good of society as well as the participants.

The school's reaction to homosexuality has been one of disgust, anger, hostility and sometimes pity. Shame and embarrassment are the school's commonly used tools in the repair of homosexual tendencies in students.

But, what is the school's reaction when homosexuality is a trait of a teacher?

Joseph Acanfora was graduated from Pennsylvania State University in June of 1972. He accepted a position to teach earth science to eigth graders in Rockville, Maryland. While he was a senior, he brought suit against the university seeking

equal rights for homosexuals. Soon after his legal dispute was publicized he was transferred from his classroom to the central office of the school system. (The New York Times, Nov. 12, 1973).

The case is another instance of the growing visibility and militancy of homosexuals, challanging the long-standing educational response of dismissing acknowledged homosexuals. Most state laws permit the removal of teacher--even if they have tenure--if they engage in "immoral or unprofessional conduct."

Recent court decisions have held that homosexuality in and by itself is not cause for disqualifying a teacher, and that is the official policy of The New York City Board of Education. In 1969 the California Supreme Court in the case of Morrison v. State Board of Education[1] held that the State Board of Education cannot abstractly characterize homosexual conduct as immoral unless that conduct indicates that the person is unfit to teach. The court added that the power of the state to regulate professions and conditions of government employment must not arbitrarily impair the right of the individual to live his private life, apart from his job, as he deems fit.

Teachers' unions and educational and legal groups have frequently supported accused homosexuals. The United Federation of Teachers in New York City generally defends the right of homosexual teachers to teach, while the National Education Association is financing the Acanfora litigation.

Still, employment in education is not easy for acknowledged homosexuals, and because we make it difficult for homosexuals to be happy, many are not.

Sorting the gays from the straight

Traditionally, principals and school boards have never had too much difficulty in detecting homosexuals when they applied for teaching positions. Teachers, too, seem to be able to spot the homosexual--for that matter, many of us pride ourselves on our ability to pick a"queer" out of a crowd.

I don't mean to say that all male homosexuals walk with a sway and have a limp wrist or verbal lisp, but they are usually "arty" or feminine or at least non-athletic--aren't they? When I was in high school it was easy, they all wore either yellow or orange on Thursdays.

It is a common misconception that men who appear physically effeminate, with extra fat deposits, wide hips, feminine hair distribution, etc. are more likely than others to be homosexuals. This assumption was tested at the Detroit, Michigan, military induction center and the finding was that homosexuals are no different physically from individuals with normal impulses (Ruben, 1965, pp. 8-9).

The truth is that the obviously effeminate male or the mannish female homosexuals constitute only a small fraction of the homosexual population. Most cannot be identified simply on the basis of appearance or behavior. An estimate by the Institute for Sex Research is that perhaps 15 per cent of male homosexuals and five per cent of female homosexuals are easily recognizable.

Hooker's studies of well-adjusted homosexuals in the community indicated that, on careful and objective phychological testing, they could not be differentiated from a control group of adjusted heterosexuals in their communities (Hooker, 1963, pp. 141-61). These findings have been confirmed by other investigators of the homosexual community.

The military services expend considerable effort to exclude homosexuals from their ranks, yet Gebhard (in press) found that 47 per cent of his sample of homosexuals had military records, and of these, 75 per cent had received honorable discharges. Williams and Weinberg found (1971) that almost all homosexuals in the military served with honor.

Freedman (1971) summarized more than a dozen of the many recent studies which show that when homosexual subjects are compared with heterosexual control groups, except for sexual preference, there is no significant difference between them. Simon and Gagnon (1967) point out that when the mental health of homosexuals and heterosexuals is judged by the same standard, homosexuals are found to function quite well.

Parker (1972, p. 695) asserted that as the study of homosexuality shifts from the medical-psychiatric to the sociological field, researchers are coming to look at homosexuals as a minority distinguished by their sexual nonconformity and characterized by needs and attitudes similar to those of other minorities. In the vocabulary of the social sciences, Parker concludes, homosexuals are not sick, sinful, or criminal;

they are deviants.

In 1935, Freud wrote in his famous letter to a distressed American mother (SIECUS, 1970, p. 5): "Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness: we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development."

Interestingly, in the majority of human societies studied (49 of 76 other than our own) homosexual behavior has been condoned or even encourged for at least some members of the population. It should be noted that this majority does not include the complex modern societies and that the meaning or significance of a given sexual practice varies widely from culture to culture (Ruben, 1965, p. 8).

The Institute for Sex Research of Indiana University at Bloomington prefers to speak in terms of homosexual behavior rather than of homosexuality and to classify persons according to their position on a 7-point scale that ranges from exclusive heterosexual behavior to exclusive homosexual behavior. The Institute estimated that one out of about 25 white males in our society is exclusively homosexual all of his life. For females, the estimated incidence of homosexual behavior is about half of that for males.

Now four out of one hundred is a small ratio but when we consider the hundreds (or even thousands) of students in any one of our academic institutions, we begin to see the

sizable minority involved. And, recall, these estimates are for the extreme position on the 7-point scale, i.e., exclusive homosexual behavior.

What then can educator do if they want to prevent homosexual behavior?

Traditionally we have avoided any discussion of homosexuality while we closely supervised student behavior--particularly in dormitories and washrooms--and embarrassingly confronted anyone we susnicioned. According to Hooker (1961) preventive efforts should center around three things: (1) creating a climate that allows homosexuality to be openly and sensibly discussed and objectively handled; (2) providing for adequate sex education of both parents and children, so that the homosexual can understand himself better and the community can free itself of its punitive attitudes toward all sexuality; and (3) increasing efforts to provide family counsel and child guidance services designed not only to promote healthy family life but also to provide specific help for parents whose children show early signs of developmental difficulities, before these become fixed.

Gay may not be beautiful to all of us, but it is a way of life for a significant minority of our students. Shall we choose to continue to treat them with disgust, anger, hostility and rejection?

[1]82 Cal. Rptr. 175 (Sup. Ct. 1969)

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